

"Arm, aber sexy" (Poor, but sexy): homelessness in Berlin

Lum, Claryce

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Lum, C. (2016). "Arm, aber sexy" (Poor, but sexy): homelessness in Berlin. *EthnoScripts: Zeitschrift für aktuelle ethnologische Studien*, 18(1), 42-59. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:gbv:18-8-10162>

Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer CC BY-SA Lizenz (Namensnennung-Weitergabe unter gleichen Bedingungen) zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den CC-Lizenzen finden Sie hier: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/deed.de>

Terms of use:

This document is made available under a CC BY-SA Licence (Attribution-ShareAlike). For more Information see: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0>

Angst in the City?

Jahrgang 18 Heft 1 | 2016

Claryce Lum

“Arm, aber sexy” (Poor, but sexy): Homelessness in Berlin

Ethnoscripts 2016 18 (1): 42-59

eISSN 2199-7942

Herausgeber:

Universität Hamburg
Institut für Ethnologie
Edmund-Siemers-Allee 1 (West)
D-20146 Hamburg
Tel.: 040 42838 4182
E-Mail: IfE@uni-hamburg.de
<http://www.ethnologie.uni-hamburg.de>

eISSN: 2199-7942



Dieses Werk ist lizenziert unter einer Creative Commons Licence 4.0
International: Namensnennung - Weitergabe unter gleichen Bedingungen.

“Arm, aber sexy” (Poor, but sexy): Homelessness in Berlin

Claryce Lum

Berlin is a fascinating city full of paradoxes. More than a decade ago, ex-mayor of Berlin Klaus Wowereit captured the imagination of the world's creative, hungry and poor by advertising the city with the tagline, “Berlin ist arm, aber sexy” (“Berlin is poor but sexy”) and opening its doors to newcomers of all shapes and sizes; today, Berlin has truly reaped the demographic rewards of such campaigns. The city has become a hub for musicians, technology and web entrepreneurs (Neate 2014), and has also become a magnet for the disillusioned, poor and hungry of Europe and the world searching for respite from financial crises, persecution and violent conflict (Martin and Hack 2015). Today, however, the promise of a “poor” but “sexy” life in Berlin remains an unfulfilled one for many people, particularly the estimated 16,000 homeless people who have no secure long-term residences (BAGW 2015; Stuermer et al. 2012: 6-7). The harsh everyday struggles of the poor and homeless in Berlin have been gradually overshadowed amidst the ongoing financial and refugee crises, the two most challenging crises for the Eurozone project we have yet seen (Fidler 2015; Kallis 2015).

This project hopes to reclaim a small space for the voices of some people who have experienced life on the streets in Berlin. This paper seeks to answer the research question, “Why do homeless people stay in the city centre and what influences their decisions regarding the places they stay at?” In order to answer this question, I carried out fieldwork in Berlin in May and June of 2015 with the aim of collecting data on informants’ experiences of homelessness, their relations with other members of the community and their accounts of physical space and locations in the city.

This paper outlines the fieldwork procedures I used to access and collect data on homelessness in Berlin, presents my analysis and interpretation of key data collected, includes some insight on my positionality as a researcher and thoughts about further areas for development. In a small way, I hope to further our understanding of Berlin city as a space of contestation, with the long-term goal of contributing to the existing and growing body of academic knowledge about the ways in which people experience and navigate inclusion and exclusion within city spaces, whether these people are rich, poor, old, young, German or Syrian.

Background information on the project

I am a student of Global Studies and of urban anthropology and I consider myself an outsider to German society. It was thus eye-opening for me to learn

under the tutelage of J. Otto Habeck and Philipp Schröder in the course entitled, “Angst in the City: Ethnographic Research on Emotion and Exclusion in Hamburg and Berlin”, a collaborative effort between Hamburg University and Humboldt University of Berlin. Through a discussion of thinkers on research into emotions and on how the spatial turn impacted methodological, historical and sociological perspectives in Urban Anthropology, I came to a better understanding of how current social and demographic tensions in cities are very often indicators for multilevel political, economic and social flows in the country and the region and how these are experienced by people (Low 2014: 25-26; Bauman 2003: 4-6). Poignantly, Flusty writes about the construction of urban interdictory spaces “designed to intercept, repel or filter the would-be users” in order to “divide, segregate and exclude” (in Bauman 2003: 30-31). This research project was an opportunity for me to develop my interest in the ways in which people experience inclusion and exclusion within the city space of Berlin, how they view the city space as a region of interrelations of places and people, and how these reflect broader patterns of social inclusion and exclusion in urban spaces and communities.

Homelessness is a highly visible form of social exclusion in Germany and the world, and it is a growing problem compounded by ongoing economic and political problems. As of 2014, there were an estimated 335,000 people in Germany without secure long-term residences, including immigrants and transient persons, and this number is projected to increase to 540,000 in 2018 (BAGW 2016; Stuermer et al. 2005: 3-7); these numbers continue to climb in the context of world affairs today. Tasked with a collaborative project on homelessness in Berlin and Hamburg with my academic buddy, Natascha Bregy of Hamburg University, she and I collaborated to formulate a theoretical problem to investigate the tensions and boundaries of exclusion and inclusion of the homeless in city spaces (cf. Bregy, this issue). The research question we agreed on was “Why do homeless people stay in the city centre and what influences their decisions regarding the places they stay at?” We embarked on separate searches for data and fieldwork avenues, eventually coming together to analyse and present our findings at the end of the seminar.

Fieldwork procedures used to access and collect and present ethnographic data on homelessness in Berlin

Geographic and spatial data illuminates our understanding of relations between individuals and the communities they inhabit within specific geographical regions (Cromley 2013: 117-129). With this in mind, I embarked on a search for ways to access informants with data on spatial and relational ways in which they experience homelessness as a way of life in Berlin. I attempted contact with potential informants through informal means by approaching

them in person on the streets. I also attempted to access informants via institutionalised means by approaching organisations and representatives working with people who are homeless in Berlin.

I recognise the fact that people who may be indeed homeless may not always appear so, and likewise, people who appear homeless may not always indeed be homeless. As I did not have access to a clearly representative population of informants, I decided on a mix of convenience and purposive selection methods to identify relevant informants for my fieldwork. As my research question concerned lived experiences of homelessness in the city centre of Berlin, I started my search for informants in the Bahnhof Zoo area of central Berlin, the setting of a successful autobiographical non-fiction work, *Wir Kinder vom Bahnhof Zoo* (1979) by Christiane Felscherinow on her time living on the streets of Berlin. I approached five people who were selling copies of street magazines *Motz*, *Strassenfeger* and *Streem* on public-transport trains calling at Bahnhof Zoo, and also on the streets in the area around the station. Licensed sellers of these magazines are usually authorised by street magazine publishers who are part of the International Network of Street Papers. The aim of these organisations is to provide the urban homeless and unemployed with a source of empowerment and income, while increasing public awareness of related developments in social issues in support of various disadvantaged groups in society (INSP 2015). I reasoned that persons selling these magazines were more likely to be from the homeless population in Berlin, and were most suitable as target informants.

I went about approaching potential informants selling magazines at Bahnhof Zoo between 12pm and 4pm on a single day in May 2015. I first spent time observing the activities of people in a nondescript way by sitting at train station platforms and at the Bahnhof Zoo square, by identifying target informants selling magazines, whether on train platforms, on trains, or in front of high-traffic passage ways or shops, and by approaching them in person to explain my interest in interviewing them for the purpose of a paper on homelessness. During this time, I identified five informants. One informant was offering magazines for sale to people entering and exiting Bahnhof Zoo station on the street facing the main square. A second informant was walking around on the ground level and platform levels of the station respectively to approach potential buyers. On two separate occasions, I identified other informants who were actively walking through train cabins and announcing the sale of magazines. The informant with the clearest marketing strategy was selling magazines at the entrance of the bank branch in front of Bahnhof Zoo, greeting passers-by and opening doors for people entering and exiting the bank as a form of service. The rate of sales for all persons was slow, and I witnessed only two sales during this period of observation, with a few people offering small donations in place of purchasing a magazine.

My initial attempts to solicit information from five separate informants I approached on the streets were unsuccessful. After listening to my appeal for an interview, all of them politely rejected my request. After two initial rejections, I adapted my strategy in approaching the next three informants by purchasing a magazine from a potential informant before requesting an interview. This did not alter my success rate. Two of the informants offered a reason for their response, stating that they were busy and had no time for an interview. After tracking the informants' activities and my five unsuccessful attempts, I decided that an alternative approach to identifying informants would yield more success. Questions of access are an integral part of the research process, illuminating "how people view things, what they want you to see and what they do not, and how they understand your own role" (O'Reilly 2005: 90-91). My limited access thus provided interesting food for thought about my positionality as a researcher. A later section in this paper provides a more detailed analysis of my positionality and its effects on my outcomes.

Through my search for alternative entry points to access informants in the field with information on the homeless community, I located a range of non-profit institutions working to improve the welfare of people who are homeless in Berlin. These included street magazine publishers, organisations providing temporary shelter, food, clothing, first-aid and healthcare, as well as legal, psychiatric and employment counseling, among other services. I contacted two non-profit associations on their programmes, Motz Co. e.V. and querstadtein/ Stadtsichten e.V., and got in touch via email with representatives Sandra Rasch and Elfi Pec from querstadtein, a subsidiary of Stadtsichten e.V.

From the latter, I learnt about and participated in the organisation's series of walking tours on homelessness in Berlin. The objectives of the tours are educational and social. Formerly homeless guides offer groups of locals and tourists insights to how they occupied and understood the city space around them as homeless people. Through this process, these guides are given an avenue for income, as well as an opportunity to build greater empathy, understanding and solidarity between the homeless and the rest of the community. My data collection methods included informal, face-to-face interviews with informants, written and photographic collection of data on route selection and the significance of each stop on each tour, as well as spatial mapping of the routes of the tour.

During the tour, I spoke to my informants, Uwe Tobias and Dieter Bichler, as well as a representative from querstadtein present, Elfi Pec, about my paper and intention to write an anthropological essay based on Tobias's and Bichler's experiences of homelessness. Tobias, Bichler and Pec were open and helpful, and told me that while I could go ahead, it would be ideal if I could contact querstadtein for clarification on and approval for the use of the information I obtained. I later contacted Sandra Rasch of querstadtein via e-mail

with a version of this paper to formally ask for permission to use information on *querstadtein*, its programmes and its tour guides for this paper in the context of an academic publication. Consent was kindly given to me by Sandra Rasch in her email response, along with useful information and clarification on some important details specific to current homelessness statistics and to the context of Tobias's and Bichler's homelessness. Rasch's suggestions, as well as methodological and formal suggestions for improvement by my professors J. Otto Habeck and Philipp Schröder and Ethnoscripts reviewers and editors have been incorporated in the final version of this essay, which has greatly improved the accuracy and value of this paper. The following section presents key project data findings and interpretations.

Data findings and interpretations

I embarked on fieldwork with the aim of collecting data on informants' experiences of homelessness, their relations with other members of the community and their accounts of physical space and locations in the city. I conducted interviews and collected data primarily during two sessions, the first, titled "Draußen schlafen ist eine Kunst" ("Sleeping outside is an art"), on 23 May 2015 with Uwe Tobias in Berlin-Mitte, and the second, titled "Berlin City West", on 7 June 2015 with Dieter Bichler in Berlin-Charlottenburg.

Tobias and Bichler were 55 and 46 years old respectively at the time of my fieldwork. Both Tobias and Bichler grew up in and spent a large number of years living in cities of the German Democratic Republic, but they both now identify themselves as being Berliners, with Tobias speaking with a heavily localised "Berliner Schnauze" accent. Tobias previously lived on the streets of Berlin for seven years between 1991 and 1998, and Bichler lived on the streets of Berlin for three months in 2013. Tobias and Bichler both spoke of how their role as tour guides was a source of meaning for them, giving them a chance to gain control over their personal narratives and to shape the opinions of others on homelessness.

Each walking tour group led by Tobias and Bichler consisted of ten to twenty participants, and each session lasted approximately two hours. The format of each session saw each informant beginning the tour by sharing the historical and social contexts of the neighbourhoods the routes were situated in. Throughout the tour, multiple stops were made at sites in the city with accounts of the personal and historical significance of each location. There were opportunities throughout the tour for participants to ask questions, and the broader goal of the tours was to build greater empathy for the subjective experiences of homelessness. When given opportunities to ask Tobias and Bichler questions in a group or in a one-to-one situation, I explained my objective of investigating homelessness for the purpose of an essay, and obtained their verbal consent. I posed semi-structured questions regarding

the nature and effectiveness of networks offering support to people in need, their personal experiences of inclusion and exclusion as well as the forms and types of relationships they shared with people.

The data I collected during my fieldwork included geographical and contextual information on each route, as well as accounts of the subjective significance of each location. A comparison of the geographical routes taken provided an opportunity for me to analyse various forms of spatial inclusion and exclusion. The following two images indicate the route Tobias took (Fig. 1) and the route Bichler took (Fig. 2).

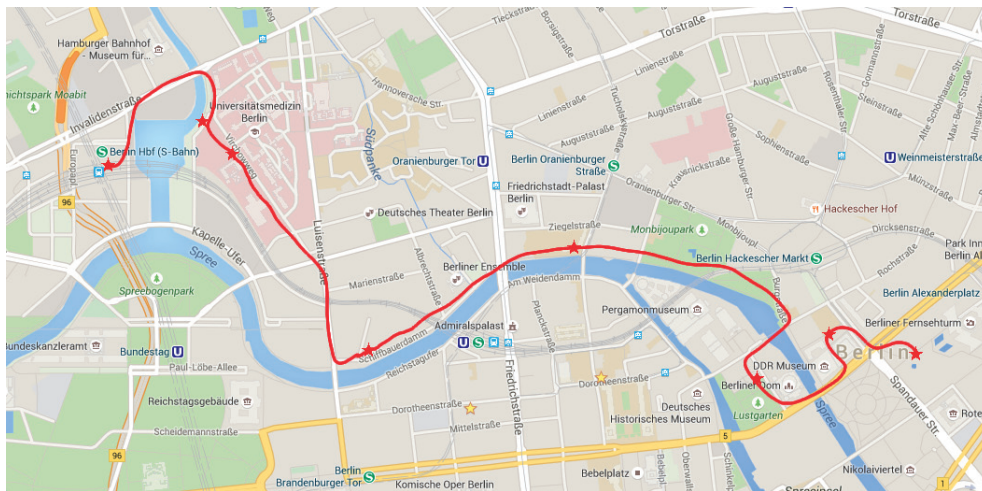


Fig. 1. Tobias's route from Berlin Hauptbahnhof to Neptunbrunnen, Berlin, with a length of three kilometres (GeoBasis-DE/BKG, 2009, annotations in red by C. Lum).

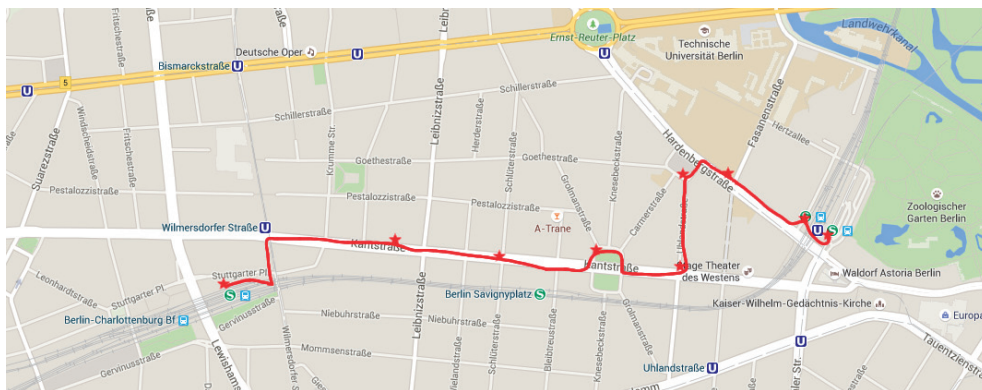


Fig. 2. Bichler's route from Bahnhof Zoologischer Garten to Stuttgarter Platz in Charlottenburg, Berlin, with a length of two kilometres (GeoBasis-DE/BKG, 2009, annotations in red by C. Lum).

Geographical radius

Each walking tour route covers a distance of between 2 to 3 kilometres, a spatial radius the significance of which I investigated through questions to Tobias and Bichler. These were typical of the daily routes Tobias and Bichler

travelled on foot as homeless people, but they represent only a fraction of what Tobias and Bichler walked each day. According to querstadtein correspondent Rasch, homeless people often walk for up to 30 km a day, especially if their income depends on bottle refunds, which require them to physically travel to obtain as many bottles as possible. The routes were therefore chosen to be both representative of the daily lives of Tobias and Bichler as homeless people as well as the format of a walking tour, even though both Tobias and Bichler would have liked for the tours to be longer.

While these routes represented a small proportion of the daily routes Tobias and Bichler used to take, I gathered some interesting information from both on aspects of spatial limitations they experienced as homeless people, which could not be fully reflected in the content and format of the tour: 1) homeless people are often denied access to public infrastructure, including public transportation and connectivity, resulting in them being physically restricted to a small geographical area; 2) homeless people find it a challenge to get far on foot as they usually have to consider logistical aspects of transportation, storage, and the security of their belongings; 3) in addition to the challenges above, my informants spoke of the physical and psychological stress of life on the streets, negatively impacting health and fitness, and which in turn affect the amount of energy one has to expend on physical movement; lastly, 4) homeless people are often preoccupied with the daily tasks of finding resources (food, shelter and income), and therefore often turn to familiar locations where they can be assured of access to resources. An investigation of the ways in which homeless people experience the use of city spaces further illuminates how such access is continually negotiated.

Spaces associated with access and denial of access to resources

The routes selected by both informants shared similarities in the types of locations included; each route included spaces where each informant lived, with spaces associated with access, as well as denial of access, to resources. Tobias and Bichler both gave accounts of spaces which were previously accessible to them for the purposes of sleeping, living and access to water or warmth, but from which they were subsequently denied access to (Fig. 3, 4 and 5). In addition to observations about the design of public infrastructure (Fig. 6) and surveillance and security systems (Fig. 5), these accounts were particularly striking examples of interdictory spaces in architectural design today, spaces “designed to intercept, repel or filter the would-be users” (Bauman, 2003: 30-31), illustrating the use of space as “instruments of social control” (Low, 2014: 18), exerting power and control over the behaviour of people.



Fig. 3. A bridge on Invalidenstraße, renovated to introduce physical barriers to limit access to a platform space under the bridge. The space was previously used by Tobias as a sleeping location. Photo: C. Lum



Fig. 4. An inner courtyard leading to an unoccupied building on Schiffbauerdamm, with makeshift fences erected to limit access to the courtyard. The space was previously used by Tobias as a sleeping location. Photo: C. Lum



Fig. 5. A gate across from Bahnhof Zoo, with a surveillance system set up to monitor and limit unauthorised loitering outside the gate and to restrict access to the courtyard. The space was previously used by Bichler as a sleeping location. Photo: C. Lum



Fig. 6. Examples of public installations designed to make spaces unsuitable for extended use. Tobias and Bichler pointed out the value of public installations large enough to sleep on and not directly in contact with the floor, providing a form of insulation against cold and damp weather for people who are homeless. Photos: C. Lum

Spaces associated with negotiated functions

Public spaces are usually designed for the needs of the majority of people in the community; in fact, spaces are sometimes designed to repel people whose use of spaces may be unauthorised (Bauman 2003: 30-31). Nevertheless, my informants showed themselves able to assert their contesting ways of occupying these spaces. My informants' accounts showed how they navigated and appropriated physical infrastructure for purposes that were sometimes unintended in the observable design of these spaces. Spaces were used 1) to negotiate personal visibility; 2) to create opportunities for innovative functions to fulfill particular needs; and 3) to serve as shared knowledge to be transmitted among members of the same group.



Fig. 7. Steinplatz, a park space along Hardenbergstraße with a layout and density of vegetation shielding users from potential passersby and from the noise of traffic. Photo: C. Lum

Tobias and Bichler highlighted instances in which public spaces were strategically occupied or utilised to fulfill specific needs. For instance, privacy is highly prized for people who live on the street, as they have little recourse from the uninvited gaze of strangers. Therefore, selected public places are used as semi-private spaces for the homeless to exert a degree of control over their visibility. Bichler identified two such places he often occupied as a homeless person in Berlin, Steinplatz (Fig. 7 and 8) and Savignyplatz (Fig. 9). The two-meter long benches at Savignyplatz were of particular value to



Fig. 8. A passer-by's obscured view of Steinplatz from Hardenbergstraße. Photo: C. Lum

Bichler and his companions, as they were one of the few suitable resting locations for one of his friends, Boris, who was 1.90 m tall – too tall to rest along the length of regular installations in the city.



Fig. 9. A park space at Savignyplatz along Kantstraße, with benches partially shielding its users' visibility. Photo: C. Lum

The ways in which my informants sought out spaces for alternative uses showed a great deal of innovation and strategising. Tobias and Bichler both shared how essential warm sleeping locations are for people who are homeless to endure and survive bitterly cold weather. The threat of one's body parts freezing from frostbite and one losing consciousness is real in winter as body temperatures fall when one sleeps, particularly if one has had little sustenance. The continuous flow of warm air through ventilation and exhaust vents at the sides of subway stations (Fig. 10) is therefore a highly valued resource, particularly essential for survival in cold weather. Other spaces too were appropriated for uses not originally intended. These included a location at the river Spree at Schiffbauerdamm, used by Tobias as an improvised refrigeration system in warm weather; Tobias used a shopping net to suspend items in the flowing water to keep them cool.



Fig. 10 Ventilation vents at Bahnhof Zoo, spaces with alternative uses as warm sleeping locations for Bichler in cold weather. Photo: C. Lum



Fig. 11 Location at Schiffbauerdamm along the river Spree used by Tobias as makeshift refrigeration system. Photo: C. Lum

Insider knowledge about these spaces and their alternative uses was transmitted among members of in-groups that my informants belonged to, and fellow homeless people also accessed and used these spaces to serve their needs. Access to such knowledge transmissions signals a form of community membership and inclusion, both of which are probably vital for the emotional and physical wellbeing of people who are living on the streets.

The physical infrastructure of the city seems to exert power over the amount of autonomy, behaviour and mobility of people who are homeless, and the people subject to such power constellations struggle to assert legitimacy and control over the spaces they inhabit and their ways of being. “For them, it is inside the city they inhabit that the battle for survival and a decent place in the world is launched, waged, won or lost” (Bauman 2003: 17). My informants’ strategies oftentimes served to fulfill their own needs while simultaneously contesting prescribed uses of space. These findings are illustrative of the ways in which a space can be “a potentiality for social relations” (Low 2014: 21), and how the analysis of space – and how spaces are inhabited or used – illuminates power relations within a society.

Reflections on data, positionality and social context

During my study, I found that, even in my research process, the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion were at play. To assess the validity of my data and interpretations resulting from this project, it is useful for me to present reflections on possible limitations of my study.

Considering the positionality of informants is a key consideration in assessing the broader validity and relevance of the data collected. It is therefore relevant to consider how Tobias’s and Bichler’s experiences may be particular to them, limiting broader generalisation to homelessness studies. Tobias previously lived on the streets of Berlin for seven years between 1991 and 1998, a period briefly after the reunification of Germany. Berlin in the 1990s was sociologically, politically and economically different, and the experiences Tobias had during this time are embedded in a particular context of social change greatly different from the current social problems faced by Berlin today. Bichler lived on the streets of Berlin for three months in 2013, a more recent period compared to that of Tobias. Bichler’s experience of homelessness, therefore, while being shorter in duration from that of Tobias, has more inflections of current socio-political trends in the varied migrant make-up of his social network while being homeless, even if these may not fully capture ongoing socio-political trends which Berlin is a part of. Thus, while Tobias and Bichler both have had experience living on the streets of Berlin for an extended amount of time and are familiar with ongoing struggles of the low-income group of people in Berlin, they both have various “outsider” vantage points which may differ from the experiences of current communities of

people who are homeless, particularly in the context of the current influx of refugees, the resulting straining of social welfare systems, as well as evolving political and social perceptions of “otherness” in Europe and Berlin. These differences in Tobias’s and Bichler’s accounts could produce some variations in perceptions of homelessness from that of homeless people today, whether through conscious or subconscious distancing from or misrepresentation of the current realities of homelessness.

To address this methodological question, I asked my informants Tobias and Bichler on their current levels of involvement with people who are homeless in order to assess their perceptions of their relationship to homelessness today. Furthermore, I asked Elfi Pec, one of the two representatives from querstadtein, on the possibility of engaging people who are currently homeless in the organisation of the tours. My findings revealed an interesting tension between insider and outsider statuses, as well as visibility and invisibility in identifying people of the homeless community. Bichler is currently in touch with friends who are homeless, and he actively forges relationships with homeless people he encounters regularly, reaching out to them as a supporter and informed confidante. Tobias is similarly in touch with friends who were previously homeless as he was, but not with current homeless people, as he expressed a wish to disassociate himself with his own emotional struggles during his time living on the street, and to avoid risking relapsing into previous habits of alcoholism.

Both responses showed an interesting polarisation of insider/outsider statuses within the homeless community, as Bichler was more willing to be visibly associated with the community in his daily life, something which gives him a sense of purpose and value (Bichler has been featured in a series of YouTube videos – “Frag ein Klischee” – in which he debunks misconceptions people have of the homeless. One of these, “Frag einen Obdachlosen: Warum stinken Obdachlose?” can be found at this URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2OFElxemVYM>). In addition, according to Bichler and querstadtein representative Pec, fear of visibility is one of the key reasons why recruitment of current homeless people to guide visitors on querstadtein’s city tours has had limited success. According to them, it is more challenging for a person directly living on the street to offer him- or herself to public scrutiny, a result of pervasive perceptions of social stigma associated with homelessness. It is thus important to recognise that this paper’s account of homelessness presents only a limited perspective on the issue, which more in-depth studies can meaningfully supplement.

Additionally, issues of self-reflexivity and my unique positionality as a researcher are relevant considerations in assessing the validity of my findings. My two key informants were both male, aged between 45 and 55, of German nationality, grown up in the German Democratic Republic as part of the working class, and both underwent vocational training and took on

largely unskilled work. As a young female of visibly foreign background, with intermediate language competencies in German and a stated intention to present the information I have collected in an academic context, my profile identified me clearly as an outsider to my informants, with a limited range of comparable social experiences. I felt discomfort at my visible difference, as I entered the field from a privileged class position, which was possibly empathically and intellectually alienating. Sociologist Diane L. Wolf (1996) explains that in ethnographic studies, the ethnographer could in fact be the subject of observation, an “other” which is simultaneously being observed by his or her target study group, potentially shaping or influencing the behaviour and identity construction of informants (in Hoefinger 2013: 43). My positionality, the question of insider/outsider statuses and possible associations of visibility with social stigma, could all account for my initial obstacles in gaining consenting informants willing to share their views with me, and could be a relevant consideration in evaluating how my informants’ portrayal of themselves and their accounts could have been shaped, consciously or not, in response to my presence as an observer. This aspect of ethnographic data collection can be corrected through greater longitudinal studies, with the researcher observing informants across a range of contexts over time, a future project which can be undertaken by a more ambitious study of a similar nature.

Lastly, it is worth recognising that my informants’ accounts were personal narratives, consciously constructed and delivered to an audience with clear organisational objectives. The narrative, subjective nature of such accounts may, on first appearance, be troubling to a social scientist seeking facts that can be empirically proven or disproven. While there is admittedly a need for factual corroboration to ensure that follow-up investigative research is feasible, perceptions of the reality can also be of great value to social scientists, particularly those engaging in ethnographic studies. Epistemological claims to truth are also often troubled, particularly in studies involving identity and self-perception, and, as Kirstan Hawkins and Neil Price explain, sometimes, “truth is not as important as perceptions” (in Hoefinger 2013: 45), and information gathered about informants’ “perceptions of their self-image, agency, decision-making power and status” could be of equal value to truth claims (Hoefinger 2013: 45). From such studies, the ethnographer is given privileged access to how “people view things, what they want you to see and what they do not, and how they understand your own role” (O’Reilly 2005: 90-91). As such, subjective ethnographic accounts are a form of data co-constructed between the researcher and his or her informants, and the outcome of such data has the potential, in combination with statistically verifiable data, to enrich our understanding of discourses surrounding contemporary issues in society and anthropology.

Conclusion and considerations for further areas for development

The considerations of validity of data, positionality and social context above lend themselves to a consideration of possibilities for future development. “Ethnography is essentially a relationship-building exercise” (O’Reilly 2005: 100). Due to the objectives of the course and practical limitations, the duration of my fieldwork was intentionally short and limited to specific contexts. A longitudinal study of informants across time, whether the informants be people currently homeless or people with prior experience of being homeless, will definitely contribute greater value to the field of social anthropological fieldwork, correcting some of the shortfalls of this project mentioned above, and contributing to the existing growing body of academic knowledge about the ways in which people experience and navigate inclusion and exclusion within city spaces.

The very real ways in which physical environments regulate human behaviour, as discussed in this paper, are reminiscent of Foucault’s concepts of governance, biopolitics and subject interpellation of the *homo economicus* (2008), with an assumption of the “intelligibility of [all] behavior as economic behavior” (p. 152) that is rational and responsive to external power centres. This presents two key areas for further investigation in spatialities research of homelessness: 1) the self-perception of homeless people of their marginal place in the economic order of their society; and 2) the perception and nature of danger and fear of people living on the streets, and how such landscapes of fear shape their behaviour and self perception (see Bregy, this issue). Low (2014: 23) discusses how the nature of fear is physically manifested in “new defensive spatial designs, the erosion of public space through privatisation and securitisation, and memorials that constitute and reinforce affective responses to the built environment”. Inclusion and exclusion of the homeless, as portrayed by my informants Tobias and Bichler, reflected the ways in which homeless people encounter acute instances in which they are given or denied access to social groups, resources and spaces. Both accounts presented a retelling of physical and psychological inclusion and exclusion through space, illustrating the intimate ways in which physical spaces shape subjective experiences, as well as the transmission of knowledge about safe and dangerous zones and spaces to navigate and negotiate one’s marginal place within a hostile society. The investigation of fear and the subject interpellation of people who are homeless will provide much value to the study of modern social organisation of resources, spaces and people, revealing the vulnerabilities of an often overlooked group of people in society.

References

- Bauman, Zygmunt (2003) *City of fears, city of hopes*. London: University of London Press.
- Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft Wohnungslosenhilfe e.V. Deutschland (BAGW) (2016) Zahl der Wohnungslosen. http://bagw.de/de/themen/zahl_der_wohnungslosen/ [accessed on 30 July 2016].
- Cromley, Ellen (2013) Mapping spatial data. In: Schensul, Jena J. & Margaret D. LeCompte (eds) *Specialized ethnographic methods: A mixed methods approach*. New York: Altamira Press: pp. 117-192.
- Fidler, Stephen (2015) Europe's Great Project Faces Its Biggest Challenge in Greek Bailout Referendum. *The Wall Street Journal*, 2 July 2015. <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10130211234592774869404581084170552090938> [accessed on 30 July 2016].
- Foucault, Michel (2008) Lectures of 14th and 21th March 1979. In: Foucault, Michel: *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978-79*. New York: Houndsmills: pp. 215-265.
- GeoBasis-DE/BKG (2009) Berlin map data. Google.com. <https://www.google.de/maps/place/Berlin/@52.5075419,13.4251364,10z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m2!3m1!1sox47a84e373f035901:ox42120465b5e3b70?hl=en> [accessed 30 September 2015]
- Hoefinger, Heidi (2013) Methods, Ethics and Intimate Ethnography. In: Hoefinger, Heidi: *Sex, Love and Money in Cambodia: Professional Girlfriends and Transactional Relationships*. New York: Routledge: pp. 28-63.
- International Network of Street Papers (INSP) (2015) Who We Are. International Network of Street Papers. Retrieved from <http://insp.ngo/who-we-are/> [accessed 12 December 2015].
- Kallis, Aristotle (2015) Refugee Crisis: What Does This Mean for the EU's Future? Andrej Matisak's Blog. <https://matisak.wordpress.com/2015/09/09/refugee-crisis-what-does-mean-for-the-eus-future/> [accessed 30 July 2016].
- Low, Setha (2014) Spatialities: The Rebirth of Urban Anthropology Through Studies of Urban Space. In Nonini, Donald (ed.) *A Companion to Urban Anthropology*. London: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd: pp. 15-27.
- Martin, Michelle and Jens Hack (2015) As Crisis Escalates, Berlin Says Refugees Can Not Choose Where to Live. *Reuters*, 13 September 2015. <http://news.yahoo.com/crisis-escalates-berlin-says-refugees-not-choose-where-120956802.html> [accessed 30 July 2016].
- Neate, Rupert (2014) Berlin's "Poor but Sexy" Appeal Turning City into European Silicon Valley. *The Guardian*, 3 January 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/business/2014/jan/03/berlin-poor-sexy-silicon-valley-microsoft-google> [accessed 12 December 2015].
- Steinert, Heinz (2005) Sociology of Deviance: The Disciplines of Social Exclusion. In: Calhoun, Craig, Chris Rojek & Bryan S. Turner (eds.) *The SAGE Handbook of Sociology*. London: SAGE: pp. 471-491.

Stuermer, Irina, Safa Djamshit, Abdul Hadi Bilgic and Schahram Hosseini (2012) Social Exclusion of homeless people in Germany. Katowice: University of Economics in Katowice. <http://netaware.ue.katowice.pl/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Social-exclusion-of-homeless-people-in-Germany.pdf> [accessed 30 July 2016].

Claryce Lum is a Global Studies Programme (MA) candidate at the Humboldt Universität zu Berlin, Germany. She is currently supporting the EU SHARE programme as a research intern at the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) in Jakarta, Indonesia.